



Personal Letter

To a Young Teacher.

WRITTEN TO THE GRADUATING TEACHERS'
CLASS OF BOSTON HOME COLLEGE, BY

James L. Hughes,

Inspector of Public Schools, Toronto, Ont.

Toronto, Ont., 1890.

My Young Friend,

I appreciate the privilege of writing to you. You are beginning the great work of teaching. I am grateful for the opportunity of laying before you a few of the lessons of twenty-six years spent in the profession you are now adopting. I ask you to receive them in the spirit in which they are written from a sympathetic brother teacher, who welcomes you to the great army of teachers; and who sincerely hopes your work may ennoble your own life, and aid in giving culture, purity, and uplifting power to the girls and boys placed in your charge. I will speak to you of your duties to yourself, to your pupils, and to their parents.

I. YOUR DUTY TO YOURSELF.

1. Have faith in your work. It is an inspiration to believe that you have a special work to do.

2. Have faith in yourself. You were intended to be a moulder of the age in which you live. The world will be either better or worse because you came to it. You have great powers for good. Develop them and use them. Using them is the only true way of developing them. "All evil springs from unused good." Evil will ultimately be eradicated, when all men use their powers for good reverently in co-operation with God.

3. Have faith in God. True faith in yourself leads to faith in God. Faith in God is the only means by which you can develop a true faith in yourself.

4. You should continue to grow. Growth should be your grandest ideal as a teacher. "Education is a conscious growth towards God." Write this motto

over every archway in your ideal educational temple. You must grow if you wish to be an effective agent in promoting the growth of others. You cannot stimulate growth in your pupils unless you are growing yourself. It is your glorious privilege to grow consciously in knowledge, in power, and in the desire to use knowledge and power for good, unselfish purposes. The surest way to stop your growth, and become an intellectual and moral dwarf, is to try to grow just for yourself. There is not much room for growth in the grandest human being ever created, if he shuts out the rest of humanity and God. You cannot grow unless you are clearly conscious of two things: (1) Your need of growth; (2) your capacity for growth. You must feel a lack of power before you can make an effort to gain it. You will not grow unless you believe you can grow and that the world will be the better for your growth.

4. You should be as attractive as possible personally. Your appearance, manner and habits should strengthen your influence for good. You cannot do your best work unless pupils and parents like you. Make yourself like the people who please you most. Do not try to imitate them merely, but study them to learn the causes that make them attractive, and live with them as much as possible, until their attractiveness enters your own spirit and shines through your own life. Good taste, neatness, brightness, honesty, unselfishness, and consideration for others will make your pupils your friends, and unless they are your friends you can never make them work up to their best limit. It is only when pupils are working at their best rate in perfect harmony with their teacher that they are being fully educated. Co-operation is the mightiest word in the teacher's vocabulary. An ounce of co-operation will uplift humanity more than a ton of coercion.

II. YOUR DUTY TOWARDS PARENTS.

1. Get acquainted with them. You can-

not truly educate your pupils without a knowledge of their homes, and their life conditions. You must know the parents.

2. Be respectful and considerate with parents. Respect even their prejudices. The more untrained they are, the more they are controlled by their prejudices. You must have the co-operation of the parents. You cannot have it if you irritate them through their prejudices. When you have won their affectionate admiration you may lead them unconsciously out of their prejudices.

3. Do not quarrel with parents. Even when they are wrong be dignified and calm. This is especially necessary in the presence of pupils.

4. Do not annoy parents by invoking their authority to aid you, if you can get along properly without doing so. In cases of immorality of a grave nature you should consult parents, but you should never give them the idea that you cannot control the child independently.

5. Arouse the co-operative interest of parents in your school. They will learn to like you, when they work with you and

for you, if you are appreciative. Have annual school picnics, games, processions, tree and flower planting days, evening entertainments, musical and literary, drill and calisthenic exhibitions, etc., and let the parents have a share in carrying them out. Be sure to recognize and appreciate all efforts made by parents on behalf of the school.

6. Be a modest worker outside of school. There are many ways in which you can do good in your district without giving offence to any one. You should do much to mould the social, intellectual and moral tone of the people in your neighborhood. You should retain your influence on your pupils after they leave school, and direct their reading and their independent intellectual efforts. You should interest the parents in reading circles, and in the formation of private and public libraries.

III. YOUR DUTY TO YOUR PUPILS.

1. Each of your pupils has a physical, an intellectual, and a spiritual life. The three are really one. They are mutu-

ally inter-dependent and inter-developing. The physical is the executive of the intellectual and moral natures. It is through the physical activity of humanity that its intellectual and moral powers attain their most definite growth. The physical powers should therefore be trained definitely, not only in strength and vigor, but in grace, skill, and responsiveness to will action. The spiritual nature may be trained as systematically as the mental powers. You should study chiefly the means of developing the physical and the spiritual natures, because you know most now about the culture of the intellectual nature. If you omit the training of one of the three natures of a boy, you destroy the harmony of his life, and increase his liability to moral, intellectual, and physical degeneracy. Sin put creation out of harmony. If you destroy the harmony that should exist between the three departments of human life, you increase the tendency to sin.

2. Remember that you have just two things to deal with in teaching, -- the

child and knowledge. In all your teaching think of the child, not of the knowledge. The child is the power; knowledge is not power. You must make the child your chief study; not the knowledge you are to give him and how to give it to him. Knowledge is of very little use in itself. The best teacher can teach very little knowledge to a child during the time he is at school. You must fail if you think chiefly of knowledge. Knowledge is dead, the child is alive. The child is a power. You should increase his power for good. Knowledge is good. Power to gain knowledge is better. Love for knowledge is the motive that leads to effort to gain knowledge. Power to use knowledge is worth more to the individual and to the world, than knowledge itself or the power to gain it. Desire to use knowledge for good purposes is the only thing that can make it safe for your pupils to receive knowledge. You should give your pupils knowledge, and power to gain knowledge, and love for knowledge, and power to use knowledge, and above all a desire to use knowledge wisely and unselfishly. These five steps increase in importance from the beginning.

) 3. Your highest aim should be the for-

mation of character. Your strongest agency for the development of character is definiteness of discipline. If you wish to condense all the philosophy of teaching into two words, I recommend you to adopt as your mottoes, "Co-operation" and "definiteness." What co-operation is to the motives, definiteness is to the executive power. We are moulded by what we do, and the way we do it; not by what we read or hear. Your pupils have to act consciously thousands of times each month in obedience to your command or signal. Pupils who are allowed to act consciously a thousand times a month in a careless manner for ten years during the formative period of their lives will inevitably become weak, indefinite and unreliable characters. On the other hand, if pupils do every act definitely for the ten years of their school life, it will be difficult for circumstances in after years to make them untrue. You may define the characters of your pupils more by the way they stand up, sit down, walk, take slates, place books, hold pens, perform physical exercises, and do the many acts of daily school life, than you can by any amount of abstract moral teaching.

4. Have very few rules. You can wreck character more quickly by making rules, and allowing them to be violated, than you can in any other way.

5. Be sure that your pupils become obedient. If all the human race were submissively, reverently and co-operatively obedient to God the highest ideal for humanity would have been attained. You can do your best work for your pupils by making them obedient. Pupils are happiest when under proper control.

6. The enlightened ideal of civil obedience includes the responsibility of each citizen in making the laws of his country. No other ideal of obedience harmonizes with true liberty. Therefore you should train your pupils to be good citizens, as soon as they are old enough, by giving them a share in the making of the rules they have to carry out in school.

7. All growth in knowledge or character must come through the self-activity of the individual. Self-activity means more than doing for yourself under the direction of a teacher. Self-activity includes the motive that leads to the activity, as well as the activity itself. You should make your pupils independently self-active. They should require no external human agency to stir them to self-activity after they have passed through your training. You should

therefore never be satisfied so long as one of your pupils has to be restrained by any external coercive agency, even though it be no worse than the control effected by the exercise of your superior will power.

8. Disciplinary agencies may be subdivided into,--coercive, executive, and motive agencies. The first class is merely negative in its influence on character. There is no growth in coercion after a child is old enough to think.

9. Play with your pupils. The dignity that prevents your playing till you are eighty springs from perverted human ideas. There is nothing noble in such dignity. It is a crust that overlies and cripples the sweetness and joyousness of your better life. "Live with your children." They will thus learn to love you, because they will get acquainted with your true self, and not the cold, unattractive formalist you might have been. You too will see them more truly in the playground than anywhere else.

10. Make your schoolroom beautiful. Use plenty of colored crayons. The unused nooks at the corners of your blackboards should be made to shine. You should have plenty of pictures and flags and flowers and curtains on the walls, and they should all have a purpose in the life of the school.

11. Train your pupils in the courte-

sies of polite society. Speak kindly an individual greeting in the morning, and give them a general "good morning" at the opening of school, to which they respond after rising. When a visitor comes introduce him, and train your pupils to stand and greet him as they should do in their own homes.

12. Be sure you speak in a low tone. It is most effective in teaching and discipline. Be quiet, calm, and patient. Hang the motto at the foot of your bed, "I must not get angry to-day." Never scold or threaten.

13. If your school is inferior in any way after you have been in charge a month do not blame the children. If the order is bad after the first hour, you are weaker than you ought to be.

14. Praise judiciously. Praise effort not merely success.

15. Encourage a love of nature, and independent investigation of her beauties and curiosities.

16. In a short letter I cannot say much about methods of teaching. Remember the teacher is greater than any method, but never be satisfied with your best methods. You have begun to fail, if you are satisfied. Read and mark your educational books. Froebel's writings contain more germ thoughts than those of any other educator. Note on the blank pages the thoughts suggested to your

mind but not expressed in the book. Keep a large note-book for recording under proper headings all the good suggestions you get in books or periodicals, or from your fellow-teachers. Keep a cabinet of clippings on professional topics. Your best educational book will be a record of your own successes and failures with the reasons that led to success or failure. Never try to slavishly imitate any one. Fix principles of truth in your mind, and follow where they lead. Get free from the thralldom of the customs of those who taught you. Get your own greatest weakness clearly defined, and then you know the great problem for you to solve. The solution of problems is never so difficult as the discovery of the problems. Train your pupils to discover problems more than to find answers. Before they went to school your children found problems and brought them to their parents to be answered. We reverse that in school. We bring the problems to them. This is one of our great errors. Your pupils will learn little and grow less, as the result of anything you ever say or do. They must learn and grow by their own efforts. You guide them in making their efforts so long as they

need guidance. In teaching any subject be sure to use those plans by which you do least and your pupils most. Independent self-activity is the only means of growth.

I heartily wish you great success. If you are ever discouraged, and think I can help you without weakening your self-reliance, write to me. If you have any special success, or if you make a discovery you wish to unfold to a sympathetic fellow-teacher, write to me.

"Make discoveries!" I hear you exclaim. Certainly. I mean exactly what I say. If you are in earnest in your work, and record your observations, you will have thoughts no other ever had. Educational science is in its infancy. You should share in its development.

I am, yours very sincerely,

James L. Hughes

